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FORESTRY SCIENCE PHOTO STORY

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Alphabetical File

Mulching With Hardwood Bark

Spring finds green thumbers outdoors sprucing up their garden plots. It's the time for hoeing, weeding, fertilizing, and mulching trees, shrubs, daffodils, azaleas, evergreens, tomatoes, and lawns.

If you are a gardener -- spare-time or otherwise -- you might want to note that the U. S. Forest Service's Forest Products Marketing Laboratory at Princeton, W. Va., reports that hardwood bark, when applied correctly, is an ideal organic mulch.

Besides protecting and beautifying plants, hardwood bark mulch is easy to apply and maintain, and relatively inexpensive. Used for many years by nurseries and golf courses, hardwood bark is now available at many garden centers, hardware stores, and food markets for home use. Its rich-looking, dark brown tones promise to be a tidy and decorative accessory to the home scene.

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Hardwood bark mulch correctly applied at the base of a white pine tree.

Hardwood bark mulch is generally available in bags that are clean and easy to handle. The bags contain 3 cubic feet of bark mulch -- enough to cover 36 square feet to a depth of 1 inch. For those interested in larger quantities, bark mulch can be obtained in truck load amounts in some areas.

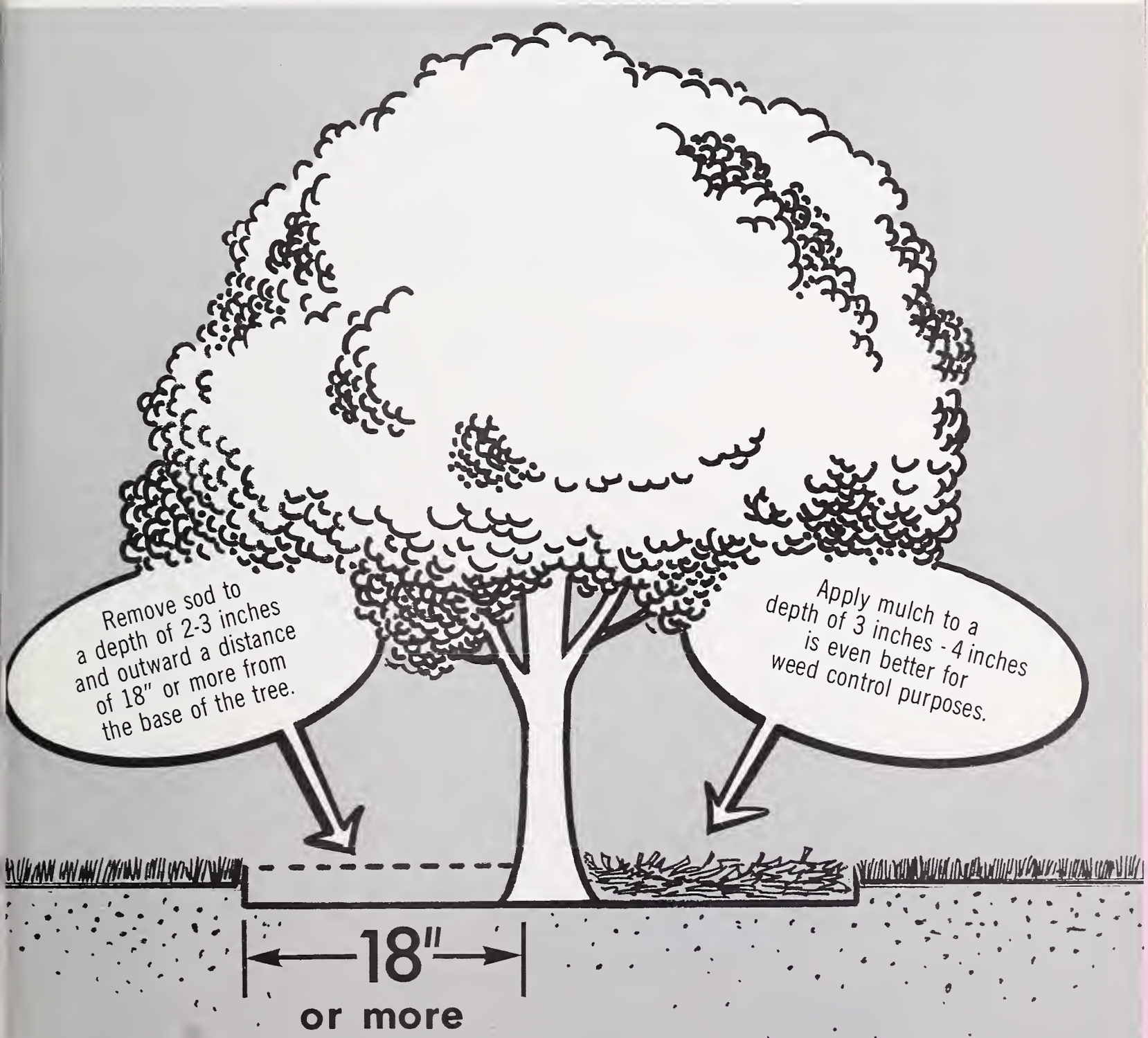
Hardwood bark mulch can be applied at almost any time of the year. However, most gardeners prefer the spring or fall. Spring applications help to conserve soil moisture that plants need during the dry summer months, and also help to suppress weeds. Besides practically eliminating water and wind erosion, bark will greatly improve soil texture and aeration.

The application of mulch during the fall helps maintain an even soil temperature to prevent plant damage caused by alternate freezing and thawing. Fall mulching will also delay the growth of tulips, daffodils, and other early spring flowers just long enough to safeguard them from spring frost.

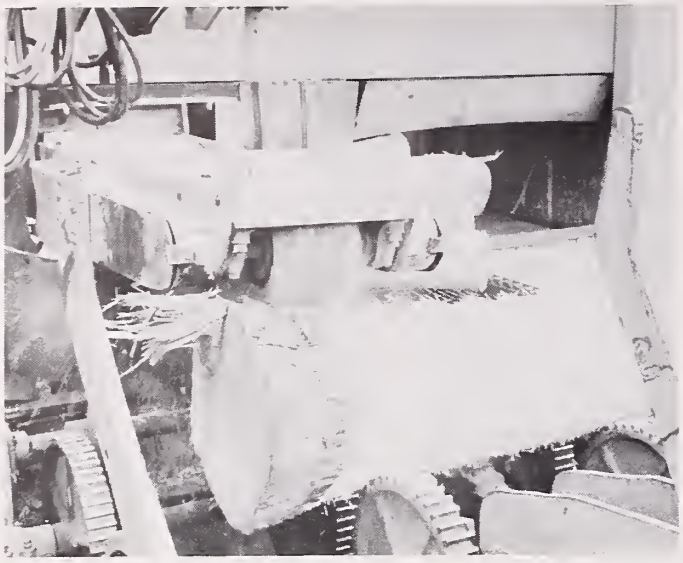
Hardwood bark mulch has excellent mat-forming characteristics that keep down weeds

Application of hardwood bark mulch is relatively simple and requires no special tools. For trees and shrub beds that have not been mulched before, it is best to begin by removing the sod to a depth of 2 inches from around trees and from shrub beds. Remove sod a minimum of 18 inches from around small trees, but take a greater width from around larger trees and from shrub beds. This not only gives a neat appearance, but makes lawn cutting and trimming easier.

Next, apply a 3-inch layer of mulch. The easiest way is to empty the bags directly onto the area to be mulched. An ordinary garden rake can help level the mulch and push it into hard-to-reach places.


Remove sod to a depth of 2-3 inches and outward a distance of 18" or more from the base of the tree.
Apply mulch to a depth of 3 inches - 4 inches is even better for weed control purposes.
18"
or more

How To Mulch Around Trees



Debarker in action on a white oak log in West Virginia.

Besides its practicality for surrounding trees and shrubs, hardwood bark mulch is useful for many other jobs around the house:

* It makes good paths and walkways and can serve as a surfacing material under children's playground equipment.

* When used along sidewalks and driveways, it keeps back the grass to alleviate the need for hand trimming.

* A border of bark along the sides of a house will prevent mud splattering.

* And hardwood bark will make a good bedding material for pets.

Hardwood bark for home landscaping.

Many gardeners find hardwood bark mulch useful and attractive about the house, as well as an ease to apply and maintain.